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Contents

DUMBARTON OAKS PAPERS

VOLUME 78, 2024

HENRY MAGUIRE

Robert G. Ousterhout (1950–2023) 1

JACK J. LENNON AND NICHOLAS WILSHERE

The Role of Pollution in Agathias's *Histories* 7

PAUL ULISHNEY

New Evidence for Conversion to Islam in Anastasius of Sinai's *Hodegos* 29

EDWARD HOPTIONCANN

Revolution in Byzantine Orthopedics:

New Operations for the Treatment of Fractures in the *Pragmateia* of Paul of Aegina 49

YANNIS STOURAITIS

Whose War Ethic? Dominant versus Subaltern Ideas about Just War in Byzantine Society 81

DAVID F. WAGSCHAL

The Old Gloss on the *Nomocanon in Fourteen Titles*: Introduction and Edition 105

JUSTIN A. MANN

Reimagining Hosios Loukas: The Monastery as Landscape 143

MARKA TOMIĆ

Martyrdoms of the Apostles of Hagia Sophia at Ohrid:

The Painted Cycle in the *Pareklētion* above the Diaconicon 189

DOROTA ZAPRZALSKA

Composite Icons of Cyprus 237

JUSTIN WILLSON AND DAVID JENKINS

Theophanes of Nicaea and the Diagram That Draws and Erases Itself 265

ANTHONY ELLIS
A Neo-Pagan Editor in Late Byzantine Sparta:
Or, How Gemistos Pletho Rewrote His Herodotus 315

SAMET BUDAK
Teaching Greek, Studying Philosophy, and Discovering Ancient Greek Knowledge
at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth Century 355



The Byzantine Portrait
PERSONHOOD AND REPRESENTATION
DUMBARTON OAKS SYMPOSIUM, 19–20 APRIL 2024 397

Abbreviations 399

Whose War Ethic?

Dominant versus Subaltern Ideas about Just War in Byzantine Society

YANNIS STOURAITIS

Studies on “just war” and “holy war” in Byzantium tend to attribute perceptions of them collectively to the “Byzantines,” that is, to the society as a whole, even though the written material primarily reflects the perceptions, ideas, and beliefs of a social minority heuristically conceptualized today as the elite, aristocracy, or ruling class.¹ Given that the collective attribution of ideas to the whole of an organized society needs to be problematized rather than taken for granted from a sociohistorical perspective, this article investigates the circulation and societal pervasiveness of ideas about just war within Byzantine society by primarily examining sources from the seventh to the tenth century, when the Byzantine Empire transitioned from military defeat and significant territorial contraction to triumph and territorial expansion. The comprehensive theoretical and methodological framework adopted here draws on sociological research on ideology in suggesting an interpretation of the written evidence highlighting the different ideological attitudes toward the justification of warfare by various groups according to social status, social function, and geographical location within the empire.

1 John Haldon’s suggested use of the terms *power elite* or *ruling elite* and *elite of service* is followed here. The former refers to the group of persons who held the highest offices and dignities, stood close to the emperor, and participated in decision-making at the imperial court. The latter two refer to all those persons who held important administrative and military offices in Constantinople and the provinces. See J. Haldon, “Social Élites, Wealth, and Power,” in *A Social History of Byzantium*, ed. J. Haldon (Oxford, 2009), 170–74.

The Methodological Framework

The ideology of a ruling elite in any society with some form of state organization is considered societally dominant because its members dominate the social order politically, culturally, and intellectually as well as economically.² The question of ideological domination is, however, tricky. Does dominant ideology refer to ideas and beliefs shared and endorsed by the majority within society, or is an ideology dominant because it is shared by the minority of the ruling elite, who do not really need the ideological assimilation of the majority of the subordinate social strata to maintain power? The sociologists Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner raised these questions many decades ago in *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*.³ They began their analysis with medieval western Europe, arguing that the social role of a dominant ideology had diachronically little to do with the lower social strata assimilating the ideas shared by the members of the upper class. Rather, the ideological cohesion of the latter group is what mattered for upholding social order.⁴ Their argument

2 Seliger’s generic sociological definition of “ideology” is followed here: “sets of changeable ideas which are employed to posit, explain and justify means and ends of organized social action, in particular political action.” See M. Seliger, *Ideology and Politics* (London, 1976), 11.

3 N. Abercrombie, S. Hill, and B. S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London, 1980).

4 Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, *Dominant Ideology Thesis*, 59–94. Against this background, they went on to argue that the “great divide”

departs from the established sociological premise that the ideological assimilation of large parts of the population in medieval societies, especially those inhabiting the provincial countryside, was de facto much more difficult than in modern societies due to the absence of basic tools for the mass dissemination of systematized ideas, such as a public educational system or mass media.⁵ Thus the church emerged as the primary ideological state apparatus, albeit not necessarily an equally effective one.⁶

The aforementioned premises of *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* pose some important methodological questions and challenges for historical research on top-down ideological integration in medieval social orders such as Byzantium or China, where societal and state structures differed from those of western European societies. For Byzantium, for instance, it has been claimed that there probably was no large cultural or ideological gap between the elite and the lower social strata.⁷ Such an assertion calls for close examination, especially when one considers that Byzantinists, like all medievalists, need to tackle two basic issues when analyzing the written sources to explore the thoughts of people who were neither the makers nor the protagonists of historical accounts: first, whether and how it is possible to get close to the ideas and perceptions of subaltern social groups through the sources, and second, whether and how the lower social strata, especially in the provinces, could become assimilated to the sets of

ideas and beliefs that the power elite of Constantinople posited to justify means and ends of political action.

A major problem for historians when addressing these issues pertains to the nature of the written material. For so-called Byzantine culture in particular, the vast majority of the textual evidence for the period after the seventh century consists of texts produced in Constantinople, which highlight not only the thought world of the social minority conceptualized today as the “elite,” but also reflect the cultural and political superiority of an imperial city that exercised imperial rule over its provincial periphery. In addition, the authorial agendas of the educated elite and the literary nature of the written sources, including historiographical texts,⁸ caution against simplistic approaches to their evidence as reflecting ideas, experiences, and beliefs that were broadly shared within society.

One way to try to ascertain the views of socially subaltern groups is to adopt an analytical approach to source evidence based on basic principles of ideology research that straddle epistemological and sociological perspectives. The Marxist tradition of ideology critique was the first to emphasize that any dominant ideology includes traces of the counter-ideologies that it seeks to neutralize. Given this, dominant ideologies have an inherent ambiguity that serves their purpose of organizing and maintaining the self-conception of the ruling group while keeping the ruled quiescent.⁹ This view has been partly endorsed by non-Marxist sociology as well.¹⁰ Moreover, a useful heuristic distinction has been put forward between normative ideology, which “contains all the central pillars of any particular value system, including views and ideas on the complete organization and structure of past, present and future for a particular society,” and operative ideology, which “consists of commonly (but not universally) shared patterns of belief among the particular group of people in

between the premodern and the modern worlds is probably not that great when it comes to the societal role of dominant ideologies, especially as far as early modernity is concerned (pp. 156–86). For criticisms of the *dominant ideology thesis*, see T. Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London, 1991), 35–37; Š. Malešević, *Identity as Ideology: Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Basingstoke, 2006), 84–89.

5 S. Condor, “Social Stereotypes and Social Identity,” in *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, ed. D. Abrams and M. A. Hogg (New York, 1990), 237.

6 For the established view of the church in modern sociology as the most effective ideological state apparatus in the Middle Ages, see L. Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York, 1971), 150–52. The ability of the medieval church to ideologically incorporate the lower strata, in particular the peasantry, is addressed critically in Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, *Dominant Ideology Thesis*, 70–94.

7 J. Koder, “Byzantinische Identität—einleitende Bemerkungen,” in *Byzantium: Identity, Image, Influence: XIX International Congress of Byzantine Studies, University of Copenhagen, 18–24 August 1996*, vol. 2, *Major Papers*, ed. K. Fledelius (Copenhagen, 1996), 3.

8 R.-J. Lilie, “Reality and Invention: Reflections on Byzantine Historiography,” *DOP* 68 (2014): 157–210.

9 F. Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, 1971), 380; P. W. Rose, “Divorcing Ideology from Marxism and Marxism from Ideology: Some Problems,” *Arethusa* 39.1 (2006): 101–36, at 103.

10 Š. Malešević, “Rehabilitating Ideology after Poststructuralism,” in *Ideology after Poststructuralism*, ed. Š. Malešević and I. MacKenzie (London, 2002), 104–5.

any given society.”¹¹ The content of a social order’s normative ideology may overlap to some extent with the content of the operative ideology, but it may also differ.

This distinction can prove particularly useful in heuristic terms to examine the pervasiveness of ideas about just war within the imperial realm of Constantinople. The Constantinopolitan Roman imperial ideology, which stemmed from the imperial office and the court, was aimed at determining how the past, present, and future of the Roman imperial order should look. Therefore, it can justifiably be considered as representing that social order’s normative ideology. The Roman imperial ideology in Byzantium consisted of an organized set of ideas, values, and beliefs that were consistently reproduced and disseminated through texts and rituals initially aimed at solidifying the self-conception of the Eastern Roman elite, that is, all those who had acquired vested interests in the imperial system through important positions at court and in the administration. One of the central pillars of the normative ideology of the Eastern Roman imperial state was the concept of Christian Roman just war.¹² Based on this, several interrelated research questions are explored:

- Can one distinguish between normative and operative ideas for the justification of war within Byzantine society?
- How might the content of a normative ideology of just war have informed or differed from the content of an operative ideology?
- Did various social groups or larger parts of the population assimilate an operative ideology of just war, that is, did they commonly (though not universally) share patterns of beliefs about the justification of imperial warfare? If yes, to what degree?

The answers to those questions are examined in two ways. First, the question of emic versus etic approaches to conceptions of “just war” and “holy war” in medieval Eastern Roman culture is addressed. Focusing on modern categories of analysis and their

relationship to categories of practice attested in the sources illustrates how analytical categories can provide a heuristic interpretative framework for better understanding Byzantine ideas on just war. Second, the evidence of the sources is revisited from the methodological perspective presented above to distinguish between normative and operative ideologies of just war in Byzantine society and to explore the different approaches and uses of those sets of ideas and beliefs.

War Ethics: Categories of Analysis and Categories of Practice

In the study of medieval war ethics, the way scholars define “just war” and “holy war” as categories of analysis is a frequent problem they must address.¹³ Besides being a modern category of analysis, just war is also attested as a category of practice in medieval sources. Holy war, on the other hand, emerged as a scholarly concept from biblical studies before acquiring a more general use as a modern category of analysis.¹⁴ This means that the analytical category of “holy war” falls within the terminological framework of just war as a category of practice in the language of medieval texts.¹⁵ For instance, for St. Augustine any war declared by God was a genuine just war,¹⁶ indicating that the term “just war” in his writing does not necessarily agree with the modern analytical category of “just war.” As a result, any attempt to distinguish analytically between “just war” and “holy war” in the Middle Ages cannot rely on the terminology of the sources, but requires definitional criteria. A principal definitional criterion that distinguishes “just war” from “holy war” in modern thought

11 Malešević, “Rehabilitating Ideology after Poststructuralism,” 105–6.

12 For an overview of the development of the concept of Christian Roman just war in Byzantium, see Y. Stouraitis, “State War Ethic and Popular Views on Warfare,” in *A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca. 300–1204*, ed. Y. Stouraitis (Leiden, 2018), 59–91.

13 See Y. Stouraitis, “‘Just War’ and ‘Holy War’ in the Middle Ages: Rethinking Theory through the Byzantine Case-Study,” *JÖB* 62 (2012): 227–31.

14 F. W. Graf, “Sakralisierung von Kriegen: Begriffs- und problemgeschichtliche Erwägungen,” in *Heilige Kriege: Religiöse Begründungen militärischer Gewaltanwendung: Judentum, Christentum und Islam im Vergleich*, ed. K. Schreiner and E. Müller-Luckner (Munich, 2008), 24–28.

15 For medieval western Europe, cf. L. Walters, “The Just War and the Crusade: Antitheses or Analogies?,” *Monist* 57.4 (1973): 587–91.

16 J. Fraipont and D. De Bruyne, eds., *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Quaestionum in Heptateuchum libri VII*, CCSL 33, pt. 5 (Turnhout, 1958), 6.20.

is that religious difference does not count as a justification for resorting to war.¹⁷

Historians also need to deal with the problem that today some categories of analysis are often also used as categories of practice. This means that to avoid rendering analytical concepts toothless, one must take into account that the former are often defined differently from the latter. Taking a closer look at the application of the concept of crusade to Byzantine warfare exemplifies this. Crusade as a modern analytical category has been employed by medievalists to conceptualize a particular type of religiously justified war: military operations authorized by the pope to recover the Holy Land from the infidel (traditionalist definition)—or to fight any enemy of the faith, infidel or heretic (pluralist definition)—in which the participants who made a vow and took up the cross were granted remission of their sins by the papacy.¹⁸ The term “crusade,” however, is also often used interchangeably with “holy war” as a category of practice to generically describe war in which religious discourse and religious symbolism are accentuated.

The blurred use of the concept of crusade has often been attested in Byzantine studies, where scholars have been keen to designate Byzantine military operations as crusades. Emperor Manuel I’s campaign in 1176 against the Sultanate of Ikonion (Konya), in Asia Minor, provides an illustrative example.¹⁹ Manuel’s campaign lacks the central elements of crusade as a category of analysis: authorization by the pope (or his equivalent, the

patriarch), a programmatic promise of spiritual reward for the participants by a religious authority, and, from a traditionalist perspective, liberation of the Holy Land as its goal. In fact, as Evangelos Chrysos has succinctly argued, the campaign did not deviate from the traditional type of Roman just war of reconquest, in which the just cause was not provided by the religion of the enemy, but by the enemy’s invasion and occupation of Roman territory.²⁰ In this light, designating Manuel’s Myriokephalon campaign a Byzantine crusade points to a use of the concept that is impressionistic rather than analytical. Older scholarship has employed the concept of crusade anachronistically to define the religious character of Byzantine warfare as far back as the seventh century.²¹ Probably the most notable case in point, and one that invites a reassessment of the definition of “holy war,” is Heraclius’s image as a proto-crusader, which had a major influence on historical interpretations of his Persian campaigns (622–628) as “holy war.”

The issue of whether the Byzantines had a concept of holy war has produced an intense debate over the past decades.²² One of the main questions is whether

17 For the start of the process of dissociating the notion of just war from religion in early modern times, see J. T. Johnson, “Historical Roots and Sources of the Just War Tradition in Western Culture,” in *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions*, ed. J. Kelsay and J. T. Johnson (Westport, CT, 1991), 6 and 16–20.

18 G. Constable, “The Historiography of the Crusades,” in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. A. Laiou and R. P. Mottahedeh (Washington, DC, 2001), 12.

19 See R.-J. Lilie, *Byzanz und die Kreuzfahrerstaaten: Studien zur Politik des Byzantinischen Reiches gegenüber den Staaten der Kreuzfahrer in Syrien und Palästina bis zum vierten Kreuzzug (1096–1204)* (Munich, 1981), 201–3; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge, 1993), 95–98; A. Stone, “Eustathian Panegyric as a Historical Source,” *JÖB* 51 (2001): 225–58; A. Stone, “Dorylaion Revisited: Manuel I Komnenos and the Refortification of Dorylaion and Soublaion in 1175,” *REB* 61 (2003): 183–99; A. Papageorgiou, “The Political Ideology of John II Komnenos,” in *John II Komnenos, Emperor of Byzantium: In the Shadow of His Father and His Son*, ed. A. Bucossi and A. Rodríguez Suarez (Farnham, 2016), 43–46.

20 E. Chrysos, “1176—A Byzantine Crusade?,” in *Byzantine War Ideology between the Christian Religion and the Roman Imperial Concept*, ed. J. Koder and Y. Stouraitis (Vienna, 2012), 81–86.

21 See, for example, R. Grousset, *Histoire des croisades et du royaume franc de Jérusalem*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1936), i–xxii; S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1951–1954), 3:20–37; G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 35, 98; G. Regan, *The First Crusader* (Phoenix Mill, UK, 2001); M. Whitby, *Rome at War AD 293–696* (Oxford, 2002) 60, 71.

22 See Y. Stouraitis, “Jihād and Crusade: Byzantine Positions towards the Notions of ‘Holy War,’” *Byzantina Symmeikta* 21 (2011): 11–63, n. 1, for an overview of all basic bibliography on the topic until 2010 and to which should be added J.-C. Cheynet, “La guerre sainte à Byzance au Moyen Âge: Un malentendu,” in *Guerre, idéologie et religion dans l’espace méditerranéen latin (XI^e–XIII^e siècle)*, ed. D. Baloup and P. Josserand (Toulouse, 2006), 13–32. Since 2011, the following publications on the topic have appeared: P. Stephenson, “Religious Services for Byzantine Soldiers and the Possibility of Martyrdom, c. 400–c. 1000,” in *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihads: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Encounters and Exchanges*, ed. S. H. Hashmi (Oxford, 2012), 25–46; W. Kaegi, “Heraclians and Holy War,” in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*, 17–26; A. Kolia-Dermizaki, “‘Holy War’ in Byzantium Twenty Years Later: A Question of Term Definition and Interpretation,” in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*, 121–30; Stouraitis, “‘Just War’ and ‘Holy War’”; Stouraitis, “State War Ethic and Popular Views on Warfare”; N. Chrissi, “Byzantine Crusaders: Holy War and Crusade Rhetoric in Byzantine Contacts with the West (1095–1341),” in *The Crusader*

a Byzantine concept of religiously justified warfare can be attested based on the established definition of “holy war” in medieval studies: a war declared by a religious authority against an enemy of the faith and with the promise of spiritual reward.²³ In my contribution to that debate, I pointed out that the distinction between religious and secular authority is not always clear in medieval societies—Byzantine society being a case in point—which in heuristic terms renders the criterion of “a religious authority declaring war” problematical as a universal trait.²⁴ Moreover, given that the political and religious spheres in the Middle Ages were much more intertwined than in the post-Enlightenment era, religious discourse in the justification of warfare cannot be the basic distinguishing criterion between a secular and a religious concept of just war.²⁵ Against this background, a heuristically useful definition of “holy war” needs to include two main criteria: one, propagation of the enemy’s difference of faith as the principal cause that justifies a resort to war and, two, sacralization of the act of war, that is, the propagation and perception of participation in the war as a means to achieve salvation of the soul.²⁶

World, ed. A. Boas (London, 2016), 259–77; J. Haldon, “Fighting for Peace’: Justifying Warfare and Violence in the Medieval East Roman World,” in *The Cambridge World History of Violence*, vol. 2, *AD 500–AD 1500*, ed. M. S. Gordon, R. W. Kaeuper, and H. Zurndorfer (Cambridge, 2020), 492–512.

23 For the dominant opposing views of the debate, see A. Kolias-Dermizaki, *Ο βυζαντινός “ιερός πόλεμος”: Η έννοια και η προβολή του θρησκευτικού πολέμου στο Βυζάντιο* (Athens, 1991), 37–125; T. M. Kolbaba, “Fighting for Christianity: ‘Holy War’ in the Byzantine Empire,” *Byzantion* 68 (1998): 194–221; A. Laiou, “On Just War in Byzantium,” in *To Hellenikon: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis Jr.* (New Rochelle, NY, 1993), 153–77; A. Laiou, “The Just War of Eastern Christians and the ‘Holy War’ of the Crusade,” in *The Ethics of War: Shared Problems in Different Traditions*, ed. R. Sorabji and D. Rodin (Oxford, 2006), 30–43; N. Oikonomides, “The Concept of ‘Holy War’ and Two Tenth-Century Byzantine Ivories,” in *Peace and War in Byzantium: Essays in Honor of G. T. Dennis S. J.*, ed. T. S. Miller and J. Nesbitt (Washington, DC, 1995), 62–68.

24 See Stouraitis, “Methodologische Überlegungen zur Frage des byzantinischen ‘heiligen’ Krieges in Byzanz,” *BSI* 67 (2009): 269–90; Stouraitis, “Just War’ and ‘Holy War,’” 227–37.

25 Graf, “Sakralisierung,” 6–10, emphatically argues that appeals to divine aid and claims of divine support on the battlefield are an omnipresent feature of almost all warfare throughout the ages and therefore cannot be regarded as defining criteria for holy war as a concept.

26 Stouraitis, “Methodologische Überlegungen,” 272–74; Stouraitis, “Holy War’ and ‘Just War,’” 227–35.

The crusading warfare of the late eleventh century fulfills both criteria. The First Crusade was propagated and justified as a just war fought by Christians for the liberation of their Christian brothers and reconquest of the Holy Land.²⁷ The religious difference of the enemy parties principally determined the just cause of the war, and the act of war was officially sacralized because participation in it was programmatically advertised as a means for those taking part to achieve salvation of their soul.²⁸ The same goes for the Islamic caliphate’s ideology of war, which divided the world into *dār al-Islām* (house of peace) and *dār al-Harb* (house of war). Jihād in *dār al-Harb* aimed at the subjugation of nonbelievers to the law of Islam, while dying in battle against the infidel was said to secure one’s place in heaven.²⁹

In contrast, Heraclius’s Persian campaigns, which are often viewed as either proto-Crusades or an archetype of Byzantine “holy war,” do not tick the box of religious difference as the principal justifying cause for targeting the enemy. Heraclius did not attack the Persians with the intention of subjugating them because of their different faith. Rather, his counteroffensive on Persian soil was a tactical response in a war of defense stemming from the Persians’ earlier invasion and occupation of Roman provinces in the east. Thus, forcing the enemy to withdraw from Roman lands was the declared justifying cause and central goal of the war.³⁰ In this context, recapturing Jerusalem became one of the goals of a just war of recovering Roman provinces that had been unjustly invaded and occupied by the Persians. The city’s great symbolic, religious value for the Christian Romans did not determine the just cause of the war, but rather was subordinate to it.³¹

Heraclius’s repeated efforts in the course of the conflict to forge a peace with the Persians—if they

27 A. Becker, *Papst Urban II. (1088–1099)*, pt. 2, *Der Papst, die griechische Christenheit und der Kreuzzug* (Stuttgart, 1988), 376–413.

28 A. Bysted, *The Crusade Indulgence: Spiritual Rewards and the Theology of the Crusades, c. 1095–1216* (Leiden, 2014), 64–74.

29 M. Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, 2006), esp. chaps. 1 and 5; M. Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore, 1955), 52–54.

30 For the most comprehensive and sober modern approach to the ideology of Heraclius’s Persian war, see Y. Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross: The Sasanian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 and Byzantine Ideology of Anti-Persian Warfare* (Vienna, 2011), 25–76.

31 W. E. Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003), 126.

agreed to withdraw from the Roman provinces and restore the previous political borders—confirm the subordinate role of religious difference to that of Roman territorial sovereignty in war's justification. The last such effort at peace took place in 627, despite the Byzantine emperor's victorious advance into Persian territory. According to Theophanes' chronicle, Heraclius wrote to Khosrow II, "I am pursuing you as I hasten toward peace. For it is not of my free will that I am burning Persia, but constrained by you. Let us, therefore, throw down our arms even now and embrace peace. Let us extinguish the fire before it consumes everything."³² Heraclius's stance hardly reflects a mentality of religious motivation stemming from the belief that God has ordered the subjugation or annihilation of an enemy of the Christian faith. That the emperor had had little interest in fighting and subjugating the Persians due to their religion became even more evident at the end of the war, when he withdrew from Persian soil after his victory, confining his gains to the restoration of the traditional political boundaries. His actions, dictated by a sober political stance that recognized the right of the defeated Sassanid Empire to exist, provide an interesting point of comparison with the actions of the participants of the First Crusade.

The Crusaders' determination to reach Jerusalem and liberate it from the infidels motivated them to the extent that they ignored the possible repercussions of a long, eight-month siege at the walls of Antioch. Having captured it, they soon found themselves besieged by a superior Muslim force that had been sent to relieve the city.³³ Their rather hopeless position militarily was the reason Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118) decided not to march to Antioch to unite his forces with the Crusaders and pursue the liberation of Jerusalem, instead putting the safety of his army first.³⁴ After the Crusaders managed to defeat their opponents, against all odds, their success boosted their

belief in the divinely ordained character of their cause, emboldening them to continue their march toward Jerusalem, capture it, and exterminate its non-Christian population.

The different approach to the role of religious difference in justifying and motivating war against non-Christian enemies by Byzantine emperors such as Heraclius and Alexios I Komnenos compared to that of the Crusaders, respectively, exemplifies the analytical distinction between medieval warfare in which religious values were accentuated to ethically underpin the cause of defending a political entity's territorial integrity versus medieval warfare in which religious difference shaped the just cause for resorting to war and gaining or recovering territories held by the enemy.

Concerning Heraclius's war against the Persian invaders, the Christian faith was one of the principal cultural values that had shaped the identity of the imperial political Roman community, whose territory and sovereignty had to be defended. In contrast, crusading warfare was a product of Latin Christendom, an imagined community of believers whose notional boundaries were circumscribed by a shared Christian identity that transcended boundaries of political authority and thus supplanted the interests of individual political entities in the West. The politicized religious community of Latin Christendom that formed in the wake of the proclamations of Urban II at Clermont in 1095 propagated its right to fight a war for the liberation of a distant "Holy Land," whose sacred character made it necessary to reclaim for their own community and for their brothers in faith, that is, the Eastern Christians who lived there. Consequently, in a comparative perspective, Heraclius's war does not qualify as a Crusade predating those of the Latins.³⁵

Moreover, one may argue for considerable continuity in the ideology of the Roman imperial office between the early seventh and late eleventh centuries regarding the role of religion in the justification of war. That the Komnenian emperors (r. 1081–1185) never became genuine participants in the Crusades had little to do with a lack of understanding or being hostile toward the idea of liberating Christian populations and the Holy Land. Rather, their ambivalence should be understood and explained in terms of political ideology. The nature of Roman imperial culture continuously

32 C. de Boor, ed., *Theophanis Chronographia* (Leipzig, 1883), 324: ἐγὼ διώκω καὶ πρὸς εἰρήνην τρέχω. οὐ γὰρ ἐκὼν πυρπολῶ τὴν Περσίδα, ἀλλὰ βιασθεὶς ὑπὸ σοῦ. ῥίψωμεν οὖν κἂν νῦν τὰ ὅπλα καὶ εἰρήνην ἀσπασώμεθα· σβέσωμεν τὸ πῦρ, πρὶν τὸ πᾶν καταφλέξῃ. For previous peace offers, see de Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia*, 306.

33 On the two sieges and the Battle of Antioch during the First Crusade, see J. France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge, 1996), 197–296. Cf. R.-J. Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States 1096–1204* (Oxford, 1993), 31–41.

34 Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, 38–39.

35 Cf. Kaegi, "Heraclians and Holy War," 19.

overdetermined a concept of justification of war in which the common religious values and ideas that Latin and Byzantine Christendom shared acquired a structurally different role due to the Constantinopolitan emperors' need to safeguard centralized rule under the authority of the Roman imperial office.³⁶ This structural difference is exemplified by Alexios I Komnenos demanding oaths of loyalty from the leaders of the First Crusade and obliging them to return all former Roman lands that they conquered to his authority.³⁷

Alexios I's demand illustrates the ideological background that informed it. Although as a Christian he was sympathetic to the notion of liberating other Christians and Jerusalem from the Muslim yoke, by dint of his position he could not present himself as just another Crusader, an equal member of a community of Christian brothers transcending political and ethnocultural boundaries united in the common cause of waging war against the enemies of the shared faith. As emperor of East Rome, he rejected subjugating himself under the papal banner and committing to the liberation of the Holy Land without first securing control of the military expedition and prioritizing the interests of the Roman imperial political community. In short, Alexios aimed to subordinate the Crusades to the political interests of the Roman imperial office—that is, the defense and expansion of the territorial boundaries of the imperial power's enforceable authority. This stance *de facto* set the Byzantines apart from the Crusaders in ideology and action. Eventually, it became one of the primary elements that destroyed their alliance, contributing to the emergence of the Western Christians' image of the Eastern Romans as traitors of the faith and enemies of the crusading cause.

Holy War as a Sacred Act

The sacralization of warfare seems to be the ideological element that overlaps the evident difference between the just cause legitimizing the conduct of Heraclius's Persian campaigns and that of the Crusades. Heraclius's promise of an afterlife for fallen soldiers on the battlefield and his wishful allusion to martyrdom are well attested.³⁸ These actions in the context of a just war in defense of the imperial territory pose an important question in terms of definition: Can warfare in which religious difference does not shape the just cause be understood as holy, or sacred, if participation in it is propagated as a means to achieve the salvation of the soul? Analytically speaking, "sacred war" need not be for the purpose of expansion; purely defensive warfare in political terms can also be sacralized if a religious authority promises salvation of the soul for fallen soldiers.

As noted above, the Christian Crusades and Muslim *jihād*—both referring to religiously justified wars of expansion in political terms—share the promise of spiritual reward from God as a programmatic incentive. The idea of the remission of sins preceded the crusading movement and had already been used by popes as an incentive for war against non-Christian enemies on various fronts in the West.³⁹ In contrast to previous views that at Clermont, Urban II had promised the remission of church-imposed penitential chastisements for participation in the First Crusade,⁴⁰ a recent argument points to evidence from his writings that indicates that he propagated the remission of sins as the programmatic motive for taking part.⁴¹

In contrast, Heraclius's promise of spiritual merit to soldiers fighting the Persians was not of a programmatic nature. He did not announce it as a motivating factor at the beginning of his campaigns *a priori* sacralize the war. The reference to spiritual merit was

36 On Byzantine attitudes toward the Crusades, see Stouraitis, "Jihād and Crusade," 11–63. Cf. the relevant arguments in Laiou, "The Just War of Eastern Christians," 31–35.

37 D. R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis, eds., *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, vol. 1, CFHB 40 (Berlin, 2001), 10.10.5, 10.11.2, 10.11.5; cf. Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, 6–24, 143–44; J. H. Pryor, "The Oaths of the Leaders of the First Crusade to Emperor Alexius I Comnenus: Fealty, Homage—*pistis*, *douleia*," *Parergon: Bulletin of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, n.s., 2 (1984): 111–41; J. Shepard, "When Greek Meets Greek: Alexius Comnenus and Bohemond in 1097–1098," *BMGS* 12 (1988): 227–41.

38 A. Pertusi, ed., *Giorgio di Pisidia Poemi: I. Panegirici epici*, StPB 7 (Ettal, 1959), 279; *Theophanis Chronographia* (ed. de Boor), 307, 310–11. E. Flaig, "'Heiliger Krieg: Auf der Suche nach einer Typologie,'" *HZ* 285.2 (2007): 295, correctly emphasizes that Heraclius is presented in the sources as having wished for the martyr's crown for himself and his soldiers, not to have promised it to them.

39 Bysted, *The Crusade Indulgence*, 46–64.

40 For that view, see E. Mayer, *Geschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Stuttgart, 1965), 39–46; E. D. Hehl, "Was ist eigentlich ein Kreuzzug?," *HZ* 259 (1994): 311–17.

41 See Bysted, *The Crusade Indulgence*, 64–74.

made on the battlefield, far from Constantinople, in 624, two years after the start of the campaign. At that point, Heraclius's intention appeared to be an ad hoc attempt to boost morale and motivate his troops for the difficult task of fighting on foreign territory. This certainly does not mean that his statement about an afterlife was not an attempt to sacralize warfare, but it begs a few questions about his intent: Did Heraclius seek to introduce a concept of sacred war against enemies of the Christian faith?⁴² Did his actions contribute to an understanding of war against non-Christian enemies as a spiritually meritorious deed within Byzantine society? How did the church in Constantinople and his soldiers on the battlefield receive his proclamations?

Whether emperors possessed the requisite religious authority to make valid promises for the absolution of sins is central to the debate on the existence of a Byzantine concept of holy war. Scholars are split on the issue. Some argue that the office of the Roman emperor was endowed with enough religious capital to make such promises,⁴³ while others assert that the imperial power lacked that authority.⁴⁴ The strongest evidence supporting the latter position is the appeal by Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–969) to the patriarch Polyeuktos to bestow the status of martyr on Byzantine soldiers who died fighting on behalf of the empire.⁴⁵ In this instance, the request by Phokas, apparently a proponent of “sacred war” and an ascetic figure,⁴⁶ indicates an awareness by the emperor that authority in this matter lay with the church, not the imperial office.

42 Cf. the argument by P. Stephenson, “Imperial Christianity and Sacred Warfare in Byzantium,” in *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence across Time and Tradition*, ed. J. K. Wellman Jr. (Lanham, MD, 2007), 81–93, about Byzantine imperial war ideology having an Old Testament tone.

43 Kolia-Dermizaki, *Ο βυζαντινός “ιερός πόλεμος”* 350–55; Kolbaba, “Fighting for Christianity,” 207–8.

44 Laiou, “On Just War,” 170; Laiou, “The Just War of Eastern Christians,” 39–40; Oikonomides, “Holy War,” 63.

45 I. Thurn, ed., *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis historiarum*, CFHB 5 (Berlin, 1973), 274. For the ideological implications of Phocas's intention to sacralize imperial warfare on the whole, that is, against all enemies of the empire, not exclusively non-Christian enemies, see Stouraitis, “‘Just War’ and ‘Holy War,’” 245–46. For a skeptical approach to the reliability of Skylitzes' report, see M. Riedel, “Nikephoros Phokas and Orthodox Military Martyrs,” *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41.2 (2015): 121–47.

46 R. Morris, “The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas,” *BMGS* 12 (1988): 83–115.

One cannot, however, exclude the possibility that individual emperors in Byzantium thought they, indeed, had the authority to promise spiritual rewards to their soldiers,⁴⁷ Heraclius being a possible case in point considering his actions. Moreover, one cannot exclude the possibility that some soldiers viewed such promises by an emperor as valid. Hence, it is necessary to scrutinize the context of Heraclius's actions to clarify whether his goal was to revolutionize the Eastern Roman war ethic through the institutionalization of a concept of sacred war against infidel enemies and, if so, whether he succeeded in that goal.

To begin with, the official appeal by Phokas to the church certainly suggests that the concept of war against infidel enemies as sacred had not been institutionalized as part of the imperial office's war ideology, coming as it did more than four centuries after Heraclius's reign. The absence of the idea's institutionalization may also explain why Heraclius is, in fact, the only Byzantine emperor for whom there is testimony of an explicit promise of afterlife to soldiers on the battlefield. A closer look at the stance of the Constantinopolitan Church in Heraclius's day points to his proclamation being a one-off ideological product, born of a state of exception that did not lead to its establishment as a dominant ideological and political practice in the aftermath of the Persian war. The patriarch, Sergios, did not criticize the emperor's utterance on the battlefield, but in 626 neither did he follow Heraclius's example during the Avar siege of Constantinople, when he played a leading role in boosting the morale of the city's defenders. Considering that the city faced a great threat by a non-Christian enemy, it is hard to ignore that neither the patriarch nor the emperor's regent, the patrikios Bonos, thought to promise a spiritual reward to the defenders. This is especially so when one considers that religious statements and symbolism dominated the exhortations addressed to them.⁴⁸

The early ninth-century chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor is a good starting point for better understanding and explaining the Constantinopolitan

47 On the priestly aspects of the imperial office, see G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003).

48 For the siege, see Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 134–40; M. Hurbanič, *The Avar Siege of Constantinople in 626: History and Legend* (Cham, 2019); J. Howard-Johnston, *The Last Great War of Antiquity* (Oxford, 2021), 207–13.

Church's attitude toward Heraclius's sacralizing utterances on the battlefield. Theophanes reports on the emperor's proclamation without criticism of its content.⁴⁹ In another part of the chronicle, he criticizes the Muslim notion that war can be a sacred act, explicitly accusing Muhammad of being a deluded madman for promising his followers that those who die in battle earn a place in heaven.⁵⁰ It must be noted, also, that Theophanes calls Islam a heresy, which means that his criticism was directed against notions that he or his sources viewed as an aberration from "correct" monotheism—the Chalcedonian Christian doctrine.

Theophanes' positive stance toward Heraclius's promise of an afterlife for fallen soldiers and his negative view of Muhammad's notion of war as a spiritually meritorious deed for believers suggest that from an ideological, religious perspective, he most probably understood the two concepts to be inherently different.⁵¹ That his criticism of Muhammad focused explicitly on the idea that participation in war against enemies of a different faith could be spiritually beneficial in itself suggests that Theophanes did not recognize a similar message in the case of Heraclius's proclamations to his soldiers. He did not interpret Heraclius's utterances as an effort to disseminate the idea that war against non-Christians was a sacred act, participation in which could secure salvation of the soul for Christian soldiers.

Theophanes was a member of elite Constantinopolitan society and a monk, so his outlook in this matter can likely be considered as representative of the Constantinopolitan Church.⁵² These normative views had been shaped in previous centuries and are exemplified by statements from two church fathers, St. Basil and St. Athanasius, that became part of Byzantine Church canon law in the late seventh century. Athanasius held that killing in war in defense of the empire was forgiven, not considered a sin by exception, and that the battlefield deeds of Christian soldiers to defend the

empire ranked as societally praiseworthy.⁵³ Basil had argued that even though war was a necessary evil for the defense of society, the killing of enemies on the battlefield could neither be understood nor advocated as a way for a Christian to claim the salvation of his soul.⁵⁴ A closer look at twelfth-century commentaries on Byzantine canon law reveals the ongoing ideological influence of these two views and the authoritative status that both enjoyed within ecclesiastical circles.⁵⁵ Moreover, it shows that their content should be understood as complementary in shaping the official stance of the church toward killing in war.⁵⁶

Against this ideological background, it appears plausible that the patriarch Sergios had no reason to condemn Heraclius's proclamations on the battlefield about an afterlife for fallen soldiers because he did not understand their content as a violation of the normative position of the church. The emperor had not declared that fighting against the Zoroastrian Persians secured a place in heaven for fallen soldiers. Given that the church viewed war in principle as an unholy endeavor because it involved the sin of killing, Heraclius's statement could be interpreted as conveying a legitimate

49 See above, n. 38.

50 *Theophanis Chronographia* (ed. de Boor), 334.

51 Stouraitis, "Just War" and "Holy War," 46–47.

52 Some decades after Theophanes wrote his chronicle, another representative of the views of the Constantinopolitan Church, Niketas Byzantios, reiterated the criticism of Muhammad's view on killing an enemy of the faith in battle to acquire spiritual reward. See K. Förstel, ed., *Niketas Byzantios, Confutatio falsi libri, quem scripsit Mohamedes Arabs*, 10.1, in *Niketas von Byzanz: Schriften zum Islam* (Würzburg, 2000), 84.

53 J. P. Joannou, ed. *Athanasii archiepiscopi Alexandriae epistola ad Amunem monachum*, *Fonti*, fasc. 4, *Discipline générale antique (II–IX s.): Les canons des pères grecs*, vol. 2 (Rome, 1963), 68.4–14.

54 See I. Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden in der politischen und ideologischen Wahrnehmung in Byzanz (7.–11. Jahrhundert)* (Vienna, 2009), 353–62.

55 On these commentaries by John Zonaras, Theodoros Balsamon, and Alexios Aristenos, see G. A. Ralles and M. Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν δειλῶν καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων τῶν τε ἀγίων καὶ πανευφήμων ἀποστόλων, καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν οἰκουμενικῶν καὶ τοπικῶν συνόδων, καὶ τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἀγίων πατέρων*, vol. 4 (Athens, 1854–1855), 131–34.

56 On St. Basil and St. Athanasius's statements not being mutually exclusive, see Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden*, 353–56; Stouraitis, "Jihad and Crusade," 54–57; cf. H.-G. Beck, *Nomos, Kanon und Staatsraison in Byzanz*, SBWien 384 (Vienna, 1981), 27–32. J. A. McGuckin, "A Conflicted Heritage: The Byzantine Religious Establishment of a War Ethic," *DOP* 65/66 (2011–2012): 29–44, has suggested that Athanasius's statement never acquired the authoritative status of St. Basil's statement within the Byzantine war ethic. This is an argument that overlooks the evidence of twelfth-century canonists that leaves little doubt that Athanasius's statement did not lack authority within church circles. Moreover, it ignores that Athanasius's statement corresponds with the practical attitude of the Byzantine Church toward Byzantine soldiers throughout the centuries. Not only were soldiers not subject to penitential chastisements for killing in war, but the church also prayed for the success of their deeds on the battlefield and praised their sacrifice on behalf of their fellow Christians.

message: Good Christians who died in a just war for the territorial defense of the Roman Empire did not die as sinners. The sin of killing, which they were forced to commit because of the enemy's aggression, was forgiven due to the urgency of the situation and therefore did not deprive them of their well-earned place in heaven.⁵⁷ If such an interpretation appears to reflect the formal stance of the official church, one should keep in mind that the church was the most efficient ideological apparatus within the empire, capable of disseminating its ideas and beliefs across all social strata. Hence, such an interpretative approach to Heraclius's proclamation, as formal as it may seem, remains important when examining the question of the pervasiveness of notions of "sacred war" in all social strata.

This question forms part of the broader issue of an operative ideology for the justification of war in Byzantine society. In the remainder of the article, various types of sources will be examined to determine whether it is possible to distinguish between a normative ideology and an operative ideology of just war and how the content of the former might have overlapped with or differed from that of the latter. Also, the "dominant" character of those ideologies will be examined, that is, which parts of Byzantine society assimilated them and to what degree.

Operative Ideology of Just War and Subaltern Attitudes toward Warfare

The soldiers of the imperial army are a good place to start in assessing perceptions and attitudes toward the justification of war among the lower social strata of the empire. The army was an institution of the imperial state whose members formed a distinct social group. Given its circumscribed membership, it may not have had the function of an ideological apparatus that could disseminate ideas within society as widely and effectively as the church did, but it certainly performed effectively in ideologically assimilating its own members. Before examining how the soldiers perceived the messages they received from their superiors, however, one must ask what the written sources reveal about the content of these messages.

57 Stouraitis, "State War Ethic and Popular Views on Warfare," 73–75.

In Search of an Operative Ideology of Just War on the Battlefield

Byzantine narrative sources often present generals or emperors as delivering impassioned speeches in front of their armies,⁵⁸ but such literary imagery has little to do with the reality of the battlefield, in particular how messages were passed on to common soldiers.⁵⁹ In practical terms, it would have been impossible for the commander to stand before a military force of many thousands and give a long-winded speech full of rhetorical allusions that could be heard and understood by everyone.⁶⁰ Byzantine military treatises make clear that the delivery of messages was the specialized task of the *kantatores* (heralds), who walked through the lines of assembled soldiers while exhorting them with short, clear statements before battle.⁶¹

Modern scholars have cautioned that the harangues presented in historiographical or other sources are mostly inventions and rhetorical constructs of well-educated authors.⁶² This certainly does not discredit their ideological content or suggest that the authors had no knowledge of and did not reproduce the ideas that circulated on the battlefield. Rather, it means that the content and narrative structure of their texts should be cautiously considered in terms of what was actually said on the battlefield and how it was conveyed. Even in the case of harangues that were written as treatises addressed to the army—such as the well-known ones of Emperor Constantine VII⁶³—it is quite certain

58 On military orations, see K. G. Karaple, *Κατευθώσις στρατού: Η ὁργάνωση καὶ ἡ ψυχολογικὴ προετοιμασία τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ στρατοῦ πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν πόλεμο (610–1081)*, vol. 1 (Athens, 2010), 139–68.

59 On war in Byzantine literature, see S. McGrath, "Warfare as Literary Narrative," in *A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca. 300–1204*, ed. Y. Stouraitis (Leiden, 2018), 160–95.

60 Stouraitis, "State War Ethic and Popular Views on Warfare," 72–73.

61 G. T. Dennis, ed., and E. Gamillscheg, trans., *Das Strategikon des Maurikios* (Vienna, 1981), VII A, 4 (pp. 232–34); G. T. Dennis, ed. and trans, *The Taktika of Leo VI*, CFHB 49 (Washington, DC, 2010), 4.7 (p. 50).

62 Lilie, "Reality and Invention," 208.

63 The content of Constantine VII's harangues in terms of ideology and rhetorical practice has been analyzed by a number of scholars. A detailed reference to previous bibliography on the topic can be found in A. Markopoulos, "The Ideology of War in the Military Harangues of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos," in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*, 47, n. 2. Since then, a new study has appeared: F. Leone, "Conveying Imperial Ideals to the Periphery of Empire:

that their content was never delivered to the soldiers in its extant form.

How the chain of transmission of top-down exhortative messages worked can be illustrated by an episode from the victorious campaign of the general Nikephoros II Phokas against the Muslim emirate of Crete in 961. According to Leo the Deacon, the general summoned his officers to his tent for a speech.⁶⁴ Although the author most likely invented the content of the reported speech,⁶⁵ the episode is illuminating in practical ways, such as revealing what basic ideas the senior officers agreed that they and, in particular, the kantatores under their command should highlight in plain words and in different languages. Leo VI explicitly states in the *Taktika* that the kantatores had to be able to communicate with the soldiers in various languages.⁶⁶ This corroborates the view that the narrative structure of sophisticated rhetorical harangues, written in high-register Greek, had little to do with what the soldiers actually heard on the battlefield. The kantatores exhorted their peers with clear-cut messages free of sophisticated biblical allusions and pretentious rhetorical exercises. Thus, literary accounts of battles presented within an intratextual framework full of biblical citations or eschatological messages cannot be said to mirror the ideology of the common soldiers.

In modern scholarship, it has been taken for granted, more often than not, that a one-to-one relationship existed between the symbolic universe of literary and highly rhetorical texts,⁶⁷ produced in the capital and the imperial court, and the symbolic universe of the common soldiers.⁶⁸ This methodological

approach usually tends to downplay the sociocultural realities of the battlefield while reifying, implicitly or explicitly, analytical concepts such as “holy war” and biblical religious identity. For instance, proper exploration of the reception of the core messages of Heraclius’s battlefield proclamations presupposes that they must be examined beyond the literary context of Pisides’ rhetorically charged epic poetry.

As noted above, it is questionable whether Heraclius himself aimed to institutionalize a concept of sacred war against the enemies of the faith as a means for Christian Romans to achieve salvation of their soul. Similarly, it is questionable whether the emperor’s battlefield proclamations led the bulk of his soldiers to perceive themselves as “warriors of the faith,” pursuing a place in heaven through war and the killing of infidels. Modern perspectives tend to take for granted that all soldiers in medieval times were devoted and pious Christians or well-versed in the Old Testament. Hence, they have rarely questioned soldiers’ receptiveness to religiously charged messages of that sort. Evidence from the sources, however, cautions against such sweeping generalizations.

That common soldiers could be indifferent and quick to show disrespect toward the most sacred of religious symbols is illustrated in the early seventh-century history of Theophylactus Simokattes, which reports an episode that took place some decades before Heraclius’s Persian campaigns. When the army of the east mutinied against pay cuts in 588, the general Priskos ordered that the most holy relic, the *mandylion* bearing the image of Christ, be paraded in front of his soldiers in an effort to appease them. Their throwing of stones at the relic is not the reaction expected of pious Christians who perceived themselves as defenders of Christ.⁶⁹ The late tenth-century *Praecepta militaria* prescribed severe punishment for soldiers who failed to attend the litany and prayer in camp.⁷⁰ The treatise’s insight into the religious practices of the military has often been taken as evidence of a mentality for religiously motivated warfare in that period, but the sanction for non-attendance

The Two Military Orations of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos,” in *Center, Province and Periphery in the Age of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos: From De Ceremoniis to De Administrando Imperio*, ed. N. Gaul, V. Menze, and C. Bálint (Wiesbaden, 2018), 137–52.

64 C. B. Hase, ed., *Leonis diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem*, CSHB (Bonn, 1828), 12.

65 For the invented character of this harangue, see Stouraitis, “‘Just War’ and ‘Holy War,’” 258, esp. n. 54.

66 On the multilingual aspect of their job, see *The Taktika of Leo VI* 4.52 (ed. Dennis, 62).

67 On the term *symbolic universe*, see J. Haldon and Y. Stouraitis, “The Ideology of Identities and the Identity of Ideologies,” in *Ideologies and Identities in the Medieval East Roman World*, ed. Y. Stouraitis (Edinburgh, 2018), 8–9.

68 For instance, that methodological approach pervades the works of Kolia-Dermitzaki, *Ο βυζαντινός “ιερός πόλεμος”*, and Karaple, *Κατευδωσις στρατοῦ*.

69 C. de Boor, ed., *Theophylacti Simocattae historiae*, ed. P. Wirth (Stuttgart, 1972), 3.1.9–12.

70 *Praecepta militaria* 6.1.25–31 (E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* [Washington, DC, 1995; repr. 2008], 56–58); cf. *The Taktika of Nikephoros Ouranos* 62.106–111 (McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, 140).

at a religious event actually indicates that some common soldiers could be indifferent to religious rituals, even when the Christianization of Eastern Roman society was much deeper and complete than in the late sixth century. In fact, it appears that the threat of punishment was necessary to force soldiers' attendance at the litany and prayer. Anna Komnene corroborates this in a report that a group of soldiers in the army of Alexios I Komnenos had been forced to participate in the common prayer the day before a battle against the Pechenegs in the late eleventh century.⁷¹ That these soldiers were indigenous recruits, probably from the mountainous areas of the Balkans, suggests that the religious sentiments of rural populations varied according to their social position and place of origin.

Such evidence points to the problems of a methodology that projects the bookish, religious identity of well-educated Constantinopolitan authors onto common soldiers recruited from illiterate or semi-illiterate provincial populations, especially from rural areas. One may rightfully argue that the soldiers indifferent to religious beliefs and rituals were probably only a small minority in the imperial armies from the seventh century onward. If so, questions still remain regarding the attitude of the majority of soldiers who were, to varying degrees, devoted Christians and, therefore, receptive to religiously charged messages.

Based on the presence of a large number of Armenian soldiers in Heraclius's army,⁷² it has been argued that the Armenian culture of "sacred war" may have been his inspiration for sacralizing the Persian war.⁷³ In that case, one must consider whether good Miaphysite Armenians would look upon the Chalcedonian emperor of Constantinople as a legitimate religious figure with the authority to promise the absolution of their sins. This is especially the case given that the Christological controversy was a heated issue between Constantinople and the eastern periphery at the time.

A different issue is raised in examining the reception of the emperor's statements by his Chalcedonian soldiers. The religious faith of these soldiers would have been configured by the teachings of the Chalcedonian Church of Constantinople, which, as noted, did not

preach that participation in war against non-Christian enemies could attain salvation of the soul. Thus, the more pious a soldier, the closer he must have been to the church's teachings. When receiving a message from the emperor to maintain hope for an afterlife should they fall in battle, it is possible that many of the soldiers did not perceive it as a reward for fighting infidel enemies. Rather, they would be more inclined to interpret the emperor's statements as an attempt to assuage their fear of death and anxiety over the fate of their soul should they die in a situation that, as good Christians, they had learned to view as unholy.⁷⁴

The contexts raised above point to an issue that modern scholarship tends to overlook or downplay: The soldiers of the imperial armies cannot and should not be viewed as an ideologically monolithic group whose religious beliefs made them prone to perceive the act of war against non-Christians as sacred. Religiously charged messages, like the one Heraclius conveyed, had a certain ambiguity in the Byzantine sociocultural context, and their reception could, and did, vary. This leads to the issue of an operative ideology of just war on the battlefield and how it may have differed from the ruling elite's normative imperial ideology of just war.

Normative versus Operative Ideology of Just War: The Evidence of the Taktika

The *Taktika* of Leo VI is an invaluable early tenth-century source on the war ethic of the Byzantine ruling elite. It can rightfully be considered the text with the most "theorizing" approach to just war written in Byzantium, and it also appears to reflect its author's intent to systematize the ideological developments that had taken place in Christian Roman warfare since the early seventh century, especially since the rise of Islam, in order to institutionalize them.⁷⁵ What distinguishes the *Taktika* as a key source here, however, is the unique insight the text provides into two types of ideology: the normative Christian Roman imperial concept of just war, which the author presents to his audience—the empire's generals, as members of the imperial elite of

71 *Annae Comnenae Alexias* (ed. Reinsch and Kambylis), 753–4.

72 Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 313.

73 See Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross*, 71–72, with further bibliography.

74 Cf. Stouraitis, "State War Ethic and Popular Views on Warfare," 74–75.

75 On the *Taktika* having an authoritative status similar to imperial law, see Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Taktika of Leo VI* (Washington, DC, 2014), 22–26.

service⁷⁶—and commonly shared ideas and beliefs on the justification of war used to exhort soldiers on the battlefield to fight bravely.

Regarding the normative ideology, the author of the *Taktika* provides his elite audience with a full-blown definition of the Christian Roman concept of *dikaïos polemos* (literally, just war, in medieval Greek).⁷⁷ According to his definition, a just war was one of defense against enemies who had initiated an unjust war (*adikos polemos*) by violating the boundaries of the empire.⁷⁸ Therefore, when the generals of the empire fought a just war of territorial defense, on the battlefield they should expect to have God as their aide, granting them victory against an enemy who had acted unjustly.⁷⁹

The concept of just war presented in the *Taktika* is an elaboration of ideas on the justification of war attested in the *Rhetorica militaris* of Syrianos Magistros,⁸⁰ written in Constantinople sometime before the *Taktika*, most likely around the mid-ninth century.⁸¹ The *Rhetorica militaris* was the first Byzantine military treatise that emphasized Christianity as a principal cultural value that the Roman army should protect in its defense of the imperial politeia against barbarian enemies.⁸² Moreover, along with the *Taktika*, it provides valuable insight into the ways Old Testament ideas and symbolisms about war were, or were not, accommodated within a political concept of defense of the territorial integrity of the Roman imperial state. Close analysis of both texts makes evident that in the symbolic universe of their authors and their audience,

the members of the ruling elite, just war had nothing to do with the Old Testament notion that held God to be the principal authority arbitrarily commanding the faithful to fight and exterminate the enemies of the faith.⁸³ The definition of just war in the *Taktika* exemplifies this deviation from the Old Testament ideology of war: just cause to resort to war is not determined by the enemy's religion, but exclusively by its unjust actions against the integrity of the territorial limits of the imperial state, that is, the demarcated area of the emperor's enforceable authority in judicial, economic, and political terms. Thus, the author of the *Taktika* pegs the Muslims as the Romans' archenemy because they bordered the imperial politeia, attacked its territories, and harassed the emperor's subjects.⁸⁴ It was the just cause of fighting a war in territorial defense of the political entity—a war that had been unjustly initiated by the Muslims—that determined both God's favorable stance toward the Christian Romans and his unfavorable stance toward their non-Christian archenemy on the battlefield.

Two further ideological issues need to be emphasized in relation to the evidence of the *Rhetorica militaris* and the *Taktika* regarding a normative ideology of Christian Roman just war. First, by the late ninth century, a notion of religious political moralism had become well established in matters of warfare, presenting barbarians and non-Christian enemies a priori as perpetrators of unjust wars. Ignoring territorial boundaries to instigate wars of aggression on others' land was viewed as an inherent trait of barbarian identity in general and non-Christian identity in particular. Although not all barbarians were non-Christians, all non-Christians were barbarians, which enabled the author of the *Taktika* to play the Christianization card as a way for barbarians to be able to acquire more civilized attitudes toward just war. This is made evident by his reference to the Bulgarians' Christian identity, which he presented as reason enough for them to refrain from any attack against their neighboring Christian Roman empire.⁸⁵

Second, the concept of territorial defense was inherently distorted in medieval Eastern Roman political thinking. Violation of the empire's boundaries did not at any time refer solely to the current territorial

76 Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Taktika*, 25.

77 For the proximity of the concept of just war in the *Taktika* with modern understandings of just war, see Stouraitis, "Jihād and Crusade," 19–26; Stouraitis, "Just War' and 'Holy War,'" 239–40.

78 *The Taktika of Leo VI* 2.29–31 (ed. Dennis, 34–36).

79 *The Taktika of Leo VI* 20.58, 20.169, epilogue 14–17 (ed. Dennis, 556, 594, 624).

80 On ideas about just war in the *Rhetorica militaris*, see Y. Stouraitis, "Using the Bible to Justify Imperial Warfare in High-Medieval Byzantium," in *The Bible in Byzantium: Appropriation, Adaptation, Interpretation*, ed. C. Rapp and A. Külzer, *Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements* 25.6 (Göttingen, 2018), 96–99.

81 See S. Cosentino, "The Syrianos = Strategikon—A 9th-Century Source?," *Bizantinistica: Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi* 2 (2000): 243–80; P. Rance, "The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianos Magister," *BZ* 100.2 (2007): 701–37, with all previous bibliography on the debate.

82 I. Eramo, *Siriano Discorsi die Guerra: Testo, traduzione e commento con una nota di Luciano Canfora* (Bari, 2010), 10.1 (pp. 47–49).

83 Stouraitis, "Using the Bible to Justify Imperial Warfare," 95–104.

84 *The Taktika of Leo VI* 18.135 (ed. Dennis, 450).

85 *The Taktika of Leo VI* 18.42 (ed. Dennis, 452–54).

limits of enforceable imperial authority, but could also include the abstract territorial expanse of Roman imperial rule in past centuries. Given that the historical limits of the Roman Empire stretched far beyond the Eastern Roman Empire's boundaries at any given time after the late fifth century, the normative Roman imperial ideology of just war allowed the emperors of Constantinople to justify unlimited expansionary warfare in their immediate geopolitical sphere, which they could ethically legitimize as the defense or recovery of territory that had been unjustly invaded and occupied in the past by its current rulers.⁸⁶ Justinian I's legal texts are probably the archetypical source from which emerged the normative imperial ideology of just war in recovering lost imperial territory.⁸⁷ Justification of his wars in the west established the view of the reconquest of former Roman lands as a right and duty of the Christian Roman emperors, who styled themselves as divinely ordained peacemakers.

Leo VI's normative Roman imperial ideology of just war presented in the *Taktika* provides the background against which to examine the ideas that the kantatores (heralds) were instructed to spread on the battlefield to justify the conduct of war and exhort soldiers to fight. The author seems to have had very clear thoughts about which ideas might best appeal to soldiers, and he provided relevant guidance as to what the heralds should highlight on the battlefield:

First, they should call to mind the reward for their faith in God and the benefactions of the emperor, and some of their previous victories. The struggle is on behalf of God and his love for them and on behalf of the entire [people]. It is, furthermore, on behalf of their brothers and fellow believers and, if it applies, for their wives and children and their fatherland. Eternal indeed remains the memory of those who have valiantly striven against the foe on behalf of the freedom of their brothers, and who have struggled so bravely against the enemies of God. We indeed hold God as our friend who bears the

power of balance in war. The foe are the very opposite because of their [faithlessness toward] him. If the heralds think of anything else along these lines, they should make use of it in their exhortations and admonitions.⁸⁸

This passage has been interpreted differently by various scholars,⁸⁹ but so far no one has attempted to directly compare its content with that of the normative Christian Roman concept of just war, which is presented in the same text, to examine overlaps and differences in the language of the two. Such a comparison reveals the absence of key termini and concepts of the imperial ideology of just war in the discourse that the heralds were advised to employ. Rather they were instructed to deliver generic messages free of such terms as *dikaïos polemos* and *adikos polemos*. Also absent were terms referring to the imperial state (*Rhōmaïōn politeia* or *archê*, *Rhōmania*) as well as explicit reference to such concepts as the violation of Roman territorial boundaries, current or historical. "Ambiguous" best describes the content of the recounted messages to the soldiers.

The heralds were told to highlight reward from God due to the soldiers' faith in him. The wording demonstrates the absence of an explicit instruction to promise the remission of sins, salvation of the soul, or martyrdom. Moreover, the author did not advise the heralds to draw a connection, explicitly or implicitly, between spiritual reward and killing the enemies of the

88 *The Taktika of Leo VI* 12.57 (ed. Dennis, 248, with minor revisions as indicated): Λέγειν δὲ τοὺς καντάτωρας πρὸς τὸν στρατὸν προτρεπτικά τινα πρὸς τὸν πόλεμον τοιαῦτα· πρῶτον μὲν ἀναμνησκοντας τῶν μισθῶν τῆς εἰς Θεὸν πίστεως καὶ τὰς ἐκ βασιλέων εὐεργεσίας καὶ τινῶν ἐπιτυχῶν προγεγενημένων. καὶ ὅτι ὁ ἀγὼν ὑπὲρ Θεοῦ ἐστὶ καὶ τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν ἀγάπης καὶ ὑπὲρ ὅλου τοῦ ἔθνους. πλεόν δὲ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τῶν ὁμοπίστων, εἰ τύχοι, καὶ ὑπὲρ γυναικῶν καὶ τέκνων καὶ πατρίδος καὶ ὅτι αἰωνία μένει ἡ μνήμη τῶν ἀριστευόντων κατὰ πολέμους ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐλευθερίας καὶ ὅτι κατὰ τῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐχθρῶν ὁ τοσοῦτος ἀγὼν καὶ ὅτι ἡμεῖς μὲν τὸν Θεὸν ἐχομεν φίλον τὸν ἔχοντα ἐξουσίαν τῆς ῥοπῆς τοῦ πολέμου, ἐκεῖνοι δὲ ἐναντίον αὐτὸν ἔχουσι διὰ τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν ἀπιστίας καὶ εἰ τι ἕτερον τούτοις ὅμοιον ἐπινοοῦντας ποιείσθαι τὴν προτρεπτικὴν νοουθεσίαν.

89 G. Dagron, "Byzance et la modèle islamique au X^e siècle: À propos des Constitutions tactiques de l'empereur Léon VI," *CRAI* 127 (1983): 226–28; Kolias-Dermizaki, *Ο βυζαντινός "ιερός πόλεμος"*, 239; Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden*, 308–11; Y. Stouraitis, "Reinventing Roman Ethnicity in High and Late Medieval Byzantium," *Medieval Worlds* 5 (2017): 77–79.

86 Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden*, 268–302; Stouraitis, "Just War and 'Holy War,'" 250–55.

87 P. Krüger, *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 2, *Codex Iustinianus* 1.27 (Berlin, 1906), 132; R. Schöll and W. Kroll, *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 3, *Novellae et Edicta*, 5th ed. (Berlin, 1928), Nov. 30.11.2 (p. 234).

faith.⁹⁰ The evidence of a number of military treatises from the same period, the tenth century, shows that the soldiers were told before battle to purify their souls through various practices, including fasting, confession, and Holy Communion.⁹¹ Taken together, this evidence points to one thing: although the promise of a spiritual reward could be uttered in various ways by different senders and interpreted in various ways by different receivers according to their individual relationship with the Christian faith and the church, the basic mentality informing the notion of a spiritual reward since the time of Heraclius remained the same. This perspective did not propagate war as a means for attaining salvation of the soul, but aimed to remind the common soldier that he who fought a just war as a good Christian, with a purified soul, should have no fear of being deprived of his rightful place in heaven should he die in battle.

A tenth-century *akolouthia* devoted to fallen soldiers further exemplifies this ideological approach.⁹² The hymn is full of praise for fallen soldiers, including references to their deeds being similar to those of the martyrs.⁹³ That fallen soldiers were not recognized and celebrated as actual martyrs demonstrates, however, that the ecclesiastical ideology that produced such a text did not seek to inculcate the notion of fighting the enemies of God as a means for Christian soldiers to earn absolution of their sins or martyrdom. Instead, the hymn was a product of the established position in the Byzantine Church that Christian soldiers fighting for a just cause, that is, defense of the Christian Roman imperial community, could retain their piety in such an impious situation as war. Thus, they would still receive their rightful reward from God should they die doing

their duty to the political community of Christian Roman subjects.⁹⁴

It was this well-established idea of retaining one's piety that Nikephoros II Phokas sought to change some six decades after the composition of the *Taktika* by going a crucial step further in his appeal to the church to bestow martyrdom on Byzantine soldiers who died fighting for the empire. According to Gilbert Dagron's argument, Phokas's initiative was the product of a "holy war" mentality—which he brought with him to Constantinople as the leading representative of the highly militarized elite circles on the empire's eastern frontier—a way of thinking born of protracted conflict with the Muslims.⁹⁵ Be that as it may, his war ideology evidently deviated from the normative concept of imperial just war in the *Taktika*, and in the end it failed to prevail in the capital.

Besides the issue of spiritual merit, the author of the *Taktika* instructed the kantatores to highlight the material rewards soldiers would receive from the emperor. The main purpose was to remind them for whom and what they were fighting—namely, the interests of the emperor and the imperial state, the politeia. The idea that the soldiers were engaging in a just war of defense was implicit in the messages about their fighting on behalf of the entire community of the emperor's subjects; in terms of regional or local defense, explicit references were made to the soldiers' wives and children and their homeland. Ambiguous messaging about a fight on behalf of the brothers of the same faith referred primarily to the defense of the emperor's Christian subjects, but it could theoretically also be applied to war beyond the extant boundaries of the empire, to former Roman territories where a part of the population was Christian.⁹⁶

90 The striking contrast to crusading ideology in this regard cannot be emphasized enough. A good example is Bernard of Clairvaux's address to the Templar knights. Bernard explicitly presented the killing of the heathen enemy as an act that secured spiritual merit for the Crusader: see *Bernardus Claraevallensis abbas De laude novae militiae ad milites Templi* (PL 182:924).

91 G. T. Dennis, "Religious Services in the Byzantine Army," in *Eulogema: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, SJ*, ed. E. Carr, Studia Anselmiana 110 (Rome, 1993), 110–13.

92 T. Détorakis and J. Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit pour ceux qui sont morts à la guerre, dans le Cod. Sin. Gr. 734–735," *Le Muséon* 101 (1988): 183–211. For a recent analysis of the content of the *akolouthia*, see Riedel, "Nikephoros Phokas and Orthodox Military Martyrs," 138–39.

93 Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantine," 196, lines 179–85.

94 The opening lines of the text make that evident. See Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantine," 186, lines 7–19.

95 For the ideology of religiously motivated warfare on the eastern front, see G. Dagron, trans., and H. Mihăescu, *Le traité sur la guerre (De velitatione) de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963–969)* (Paris 1986), 284–87; cf. Stouraitis, "'Just War' and 'Holy War,'" 245–46, 249, esp. n. 103.

96 In the mid-tenth century *De velitatione bellica*, the author identifies the centrality of the Christian faith as the principal cultural marker binding the subjects of the Roman emperor together when he states that the soldiers fight on behalf of the holy emperors and all Christians. See *De velitatione bellica* 19.33–35 (G. T. Dennis, *Three Military Treatises*, CFHB 25 [Washington, DC, 1985], 216). Cf. also the instructions of the *Praecepta Militaria* and the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos regarding the short prayers the soldiers

Last but not least, the author of the *Taktika* asserted that common soldiers should be reminded of the enemy's lack of faith in God. Modern scholars have been keen to read a direct reference to the Muslims in this message, but a closer look at the discourse in the *Taktika* on God's punishment of Christian Bulgarians on the battlefield due to their unjust attack against the empire,⁹⁷ and similar references in other contemporary Byzantine sources, demonstrates that the message could equally be applied to delegitimize Orthodox Christian enemies when they failed to behave like proper Christians and, against the will of God, violated the territory of the Roman Empire.⁹⁸ To the author, a lack of faith in God was not strictly a matter of the religious confession of the opposing army, but one of political moralism and the just conduct of war. It was employed and functioned primarily as a signifier to distinguish between those who acted unjustly as aggressors, be they Christian or non-Christian, and those who fought a just war, thus remaining faithful to God's prohibition on instigating armed conflict.⁹⁹ It was this broader understanding of faithlessness that enabled the Romans to appeal to the help of sacred relics in wars against Christian enemies who attacked the empire.¹⁰⁰

The author of the *Taktika* established the relationship between just war and God's aid on the battlefield in his normative definition of just war in an address to the generals of the empire:

If our adversary should act unwisely, initiate unjust hostilities, and invade our territory, then you do indeed have a just cause, inasmuch as an unjust war has been begun by the enemy. With confidence and enthusiasm take up arms against them. It is they who have provided the cause by unjustly raising their hands against those subject to us. Take courage then. *You will have the God of justice on your side. Taking up the struggle*

should say before engaging in battle: *Praecepta Militaria* 4.106–20 (ed. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 44); *Taktika of Nikephoros Ouranos* 61.159–72 (ed. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 126).

97 *The Taktika of Leo VI* 18.40 (ed. Dennis, 452).

98 Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden*, 309–10, 322–26.

99 The author declares in the prologue that the people who did not instigate wars followed God's will. See *The Taktika of Leo VI*, prologue 4 (ed. Dennis, 4).

100 I. Bekker, ed., *Theophanes Continuatus*, bk. 6 (Bonn, 1838), 388, lines 13–17, and 388, line 23–389, line 4.

*on behalf of your brothers, you and your whole force will be victorious.*¹⁰¹

Comparing the content of this statement, addressed to the members of the imperial elite of service, with the content of the messages addressed to the common soldiers, it becomes obvious that such ideas as just cause, unjust hostilities, and territorial invasion were omitted from the discourse employed on the battlefield. The author of the *Taktika* believed that for common soldiers, the best signifiers for justifying their actions were protection of their fellow Christian brothers alongside God aiding them in battle.

In light of the evidence presented so far, one may conclude that the main overlap between the normative and the operative ideology of just war in the *Taktika* pertained to the following basic ideas: God, the ultimate judge of all things, aided those who acted justly on the battlefield, namely, those who acted not as aggressors, but as defenders of their community (local, regional, supra-regional) against foreign invaders. It was not the enemy's religion that justified the conduct of war against them, but their offensive actions against the Christian subjects of the emperor and his territory. Within this framework, the justness of the cause for resorting to war was disassociated from the outcome of the conflict by the societally dominant belief that the outcome ultimately depended upon God's will. Given that a war fought for a just cause, such as the defense of one's territory, could and often did end in defeat on the battlefield, interpreting it as God's punishment for the Christian Romans due to their sins rationalized such an outcome.¹⁰²

Comparing the content of the ideas circulating on the battlefield with the content of the normative just war

101 *The Taktika of Leo VI* 2.31 (ed. Dennis, 34–37, emphasis added): Εἰ δέ γε μὴ σωφρονεῖ τὸ ἀντίπαλον, ἀλλ' αὐτοὶ τῆς ἀδικίας ἀπάρξονται τὴν ἡμετέραν κατατρέχοντες γῆν, τότε ἄρα δικαίως αἰτίας προκειμένης ὡς καὶ ἀδίκου πολέμου παρὰ τῶν ἐναντίων ἀπαρχομένου, θαρσαλέως καὶ σὺν προθυμίᾳ τοῦ κατ' αὐτῶν ἐγχείρει πολέμου, ὡς ἐκείνων τὰς αἰτίας παρασχομένων καὶ ἀδίκους χεῖρας κατὰ τῶν ὑποτελῶν ἡμῖν ἀραμένων· καὶ θάρρει τότε ὡς καὶ τὸν τῆς δικαιοσύνης Θεὸν ἐξεῖς βοηθόν, καὶ τοὺς ὑπὲρ ἀδελφῶν ἀναδεχόμενος ἀγῶνας πανστρατιᾷ τὴν νίκην ἐξεῖς.

102 A typical example of this can be found in one of the later versions of the martyrion of the forty-two martyrs of Amorion, that is, the version written by Evodios in the late ninth century. The author blames the heretical views of Roman emperors for the biggest military defeats by the Muslims beginning in the seventh century. See P. Nikitin and V. Vasilievskij, *Skazaniia o 42 amorijskich mucenikach* (St. Petersburg, 1906), 62–64.

concept of the imperial office indicates an awareness by the imperial power of which notions and beliefs would better appeal to the common soldiers and the need to respond to their needs and fears. The imperial armies consisted mainly of professionals who sold their blood to the emperor with the expectation of receiving just compensation in return.¹⁰³ Besides regular and generous compensation, the author of the text was aware that the best way to motivate them to fight bravely was not to highlight central concepts of the normative imperial ideology of just war, such as defense of the civilized Roman *politeia*, its territorial integrity, or its rightful claims to reconquer lost parts of the Roman Empire. Rather, the key was to reassure them that the defense of their fellow Christians and their families was a just cause that made God their aide on the battlefield; that they would be well compensated by the emperor if they survived; and that they would not die as sinners should they fall in battle.

This allows for further conclusions. If common soldiers feared anything, it was death and, depending on the strength of their religious beliefs, God's judgment in the afterlife.¹⁰⁴ If they cared for something, it was primarily their pay, their families and closest kin, and their local community. Loyalty to the emperor and a shared religious identity evoking a broader vision of brotherhood were the main ideas with the potential to bind them to a larger community like the imperial *politeia*. The predominant role of the language of micro-solidarity, highlighting the bonds of family and place of origin, demonstrates the sophistication of the imperial state's practice of ideological integration. This is particularly the case if one considers the *Taktika*'s instruction to the generals to assemble the military squads of each unit based on friendship and kinship.¹⁰⁵

As sociological research on warfare has demonstrated, human beings tend to be more willing to fight and die on behalf of micro-level groups with which they

have strong emotional and moral ties than for larger entities (empires, states, nations) or for abstract ideological principles. Professional soldiers in particular are motivated first and foremost by the personal ties they develop with their peers in the same company.¹⁰⁶ The *Taktika* shows that the imperial power was well aware that the bonds of micro-solidarity were equally, if not more, important for group cohesion on the battlefield compared to such abstract ideas as the love of God and Christian brotherhood.

Promoting the ideological motivation and cohesion of the army on the battlefield was obviously an important goal for the imperial power given the army's remit of conducting the empire's wars of defense or expansion, thus securing the stability and continuity of the centralized state. It is therefore worth asking whether that operative ideology of just war extended beyond the army as a distinct social group, that is, whether it pervaded broader elements of the empire's population, especially the lower strata in the provinces.

Provincial Notions of Just War

Exploring provincial ideas about just war means, again, tackling the problem of the sources, that is, determining which sources reveal something about or most closely reflect the perceptions of war among provincial populations. Two types of sources are most likely to provide direct insight into provincial mentalities: inscriptions from provincial buildings whose content relates to warfare and hagiographical texts written in a provincial context.

One must keep in mind that in the period under examination, the experience of war for the provincial populations of the empire pertained to the defense and survival of their local communities against raiding enemies over extended periods.¹⁰⁷ As Frank Trombley has shown, the evidence of inscriptions in Anatolia from the sixth century onward provides important

103 See C. Rouché, trans. *Kekaumenos, Consilia et Narrationes* (2013), 94–95, <https://ancientwisdoms.ac.uk/library/kekaumenos-consilia-et-narrationes/>; J. van Dieten, ed., *Nicetae Choniatae historia*, pt. 1 (Berlin, 1975), 62; cf. *The Taktika of Leo VI* 13.4 (ed. Dennis, 278).

104 Insight into soldiers' fear of death is provided by the story of one who prayed for his life in the middle of a battle in late sixth-century Africa. See John Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale* (PG 87.3:2868); cf. the relevant commentary of this report in F. Trombley, "War, Society, and Popular Religion in Anatolia," in *Byzantine Asia Minor (6th–12th cent.)*, ed. S. Lampakis (Athens, 1998), 108.

105 *The Taktika of Leo VI* 4.40–41 (ed. Dennis, 58).

106 Š. Malešević, *The Sociology of War and Violence* (Cambridge, 2010), 187–88.

107 H. Ahrweiler, "L'Asie Mineure et les invasions arabes (VII^e–IX^e siècles)," *RH* 227 (1962): 7–19; R.-J. Lilie, *Die byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber: Studien zur Strukturwandlung des byzantinischen Staates im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1976), 60–82, 85–87, 112–22, 133; Trombley, "War, Society, and Popular Religion in Anatolia," 100–18; Y. Stouraitis, "Trapped in the Imperial Narrative: Some Reflections on Warfare and the Provincial Masses in Byzantium (600–1204)," *BMGS* 44.1 (2020): 6–18.

insight into the efforts of the imperial administration to incorporate local defense into the narrative of imperial defense by exalting the role of the imperial power in the rebuilding of fortifications.¹⁰⁸ Alongside that normative ideological approach to defensive warfare, inscriptions also testify abundantly to the societal pervasiveness of the notion of local defense being tied to divine intervention and aid.¹⁰⁹ The notion that God took the side of and helped those who defended their own land against those who attacked them appears to have functioned in provincial areas as a signifier of just war.

Inscriptions, however, inform primarily about the message that a patron wanted to convey to local society; they cannot indicate how such messages were received or how pervasive their ideas might have been among provincial commoners. One way to try to bridge this gap is to examine texts produced in a provincial context, in particular, saints' lives whose authors were not members of the high clergy and, therefore, were not well integrated into the Constantinopolitan mentality of imperial society. One such text is the *Life* of St. Antony the Younger, written by a provincial author, probably a pupil of the saint with no vested interest in the imperial system or a direct connection to Constantinopolitan culture. By the standards of the genre, it is rare in providing insight into ideas about the justification of warfare.

The author's report on a Muslim naval raid against a town in southern Asia Minor, either Attaleia or Syliaion, focuses on an exchange between two opposing commanders, at a meeting before hostilities ensue, in which they argue for the justness of their actions. The Muslim commander justifies the raid by claiming that he came to avenge aggressions by the Roman imperial armies against the territories of the Abbasid Empire in Syria.¹¹⁰ Antony, serving as the city's military commander at the time, refutes the enemy's argument, stating that the Roman emperor orders his officers to do as he wishes and that this had been done; the emperor had sent fleets and raised armies against those resisting his dominion regardless of whether his subjects conceded to it. Antony goes on to warn the Muslims that if they do

not therefore refrain from attacking the provincial city and its population, they will face the just punishment of almighty God, who would not allow them to return to their land. Should the Muslims decide to withdraw and leave the city in peace, however, the locals would compensate them with rewards, and if not, they would stand their ground in the name of God and let him decide the outcome of the conflict according to his will.¹¹¹

The reported dialogue, fictitious as it may be, shows that provincial thought about just war could deviate considerably from the Constantinopolitan normative imperial ideology of *dikaios polemos*. The author does not dismiss the Muslim enemy's justification on the basis of a religious-political moralism defining any barbarian or infidel attack against imperial territory as unjust. In fact, he appears indifferent to the Roman imperial power's political rationale of just war, emphasizing that the members of the local community bore no responsibility for the decisions and actions of the emperor on faraway war fronts. His statement suggests no effort to identify just war in defense of the local community with just war in defense of the current territorial limits or restoration of the former limits of the imperial *politeia*. From the provincial author's viewpoint, the Muslim attack against his community was unjust not because they invaded the territory of the Christian Roman emperor and harassed his subjects, but because the Muslims attacked a city whose inhabitants were not responsible for any wrongdoing against them. The author's discourse seems to imply here that the Muslim commander's justifying argument about retaliation would have validity only if the Muslims had attacked Constantinople, the imperial center leading the war against their cities and territories.

The provincial author's deviation from the normative imperial ideology of just war becomes explicit when comparing statements in the *Life* with those of a nearly contemporary text written at the imperial court during the reign of Leo VI. Arethas, the bishop of Kaisareia, addresses a sermon to the emperor in 902 in celebration of the conquest of Phasiane, a Muslim city in the east. He justifies this act of war by stating that the emperor did not conquer what was not his, but what had been

108 See the evidence and the relevant analysis in Trombley, "War, Society, and Popular Religion in Anatolia," 118–32.

109 Trombley, "War, Society, and Popular Religion in Anatolia," 118–32.

110 A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Βίος και πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου Ἀντωνίου Νέου* (St. Petersburg, 1907), 199.

111 Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Βίος και πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου Ἀντωνίου Νέου*, 200.

under the Roman iron rod in the past.¹¹² This is an argument informed by notions of Roman imperial *raison d'état*, for which resorting to war for the reconquest of any territory that had been under Roman imperial rule in the past did not count as aggression but was justified as a response to past aggression by the enemy. The *Life* of St. Antony the Younger shows that the *raison d'état* informing Roman imperial just war could be wholly absent from the thought world of a provincial audience unassimilated to Constantinopolitan political thinking.

On the other hand, the discourse in the saint's *Life* demonstrates some ideological overlap with the *Taktika's* operative ideology in regard to the role of the divine in the justification of war. The provincial author made God's support in war dependent upon the justness of the cause for resort to armed force and identified just cause with the act of defense. In this ideological context, the accentuation of God's role as an aide of the city's defenders functions as the principal signifier that their cause was just. Contrary to the ideology of the army in the *Taktika*, however, where the interests of the imperial power inform the idea of defense, in the provincial hagiographical text, defense is understood in strictly regional or local terms. Although the evidence from inscriptions demonstrates how the imperial power and provincial elites sought to bind regional or local defense to the grand narrative of the empire's defense, the evidence from Antony's *Life* cautions against sweeping interpretations attributing provincial actions of local defense as stemming from an ideological motivation to defend the Roman imperial *politeia* when local garrisons and civilians faced enemy attacks.¹¹³

Some indicative examples that confirm the need for such caution can be found in the late eleventh and the twelfth centuries, a period in which the contracted empire of Constantinople was under extreme pressure by external enemies. The evidence from the period shows that populations in areas directly affected by warfare, where the goals of local defense and defense of the empire's territorial integrity should overlap, did not

always rally around the flag of the imperial center when an enemy attack took place.

The 1081 Norman invasion of Eastern Roman lands under Alexios I Komnenos provides an illustrative example. A significant part of the local elite and other populations of the western Balkans, the core territory of the radically contracted imperial state at the time, showed themselves unmotivated to defend Roman territory against the Normans and instead proved ready to side with the invaders and march against the imperial army.¹¹⁴ They switched sides only when the emperor managed to defeat the enemy. Under John II Komnenos (r. 1118–1143), Christian Roman populations in Asia Minor preferred Turkish rule and actively resisted imperial reconquest, a fight that they obviously perceived as a just war of local defense against the distant imperial power of Constantinople. The emperor justified the resort to war against that indigenous community of Greek-speaking Christians as restoration of Roman imperial rule over former Roman land.¹¹⁵ Under Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143–1180), Norman naval raids against several coastal cities in Greece demonstrate that the defense of local interests did not always overlap with the defense of the empire's territorial integrity. For instance, the people of Corfu sided with the enemy and admitted a Norman garrison into their city instead of fighting to defend imperial territory. When Manuel besieged the city two years later, in 1149, to force the Normans out and restore Roman rule, the locals evidently remained loyal to the Norman garrison and fought a just war to defend their locality until the Normans surrendered and withdrew.¹¹⁶

Viewed along with the evidence from the *Life* of St. Antony the Younger, such episodes point to the basic operative ideas that justified the conduct of war among the empire's provincial populations in different periods. These included the defense of their lives and local communities and, moreover, the idea that God was the ultimate judge of the outcome of war and that he helped those defending themselves against unjust aggressors. The motive of local defense usually overlapped with the

112 L. G. Westerink, *Arethae Archiepiscopi Caesariaensis Scripta Minora*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1968), 62.33–34.

113 The *Life* of St. Antony testifies to civilians taking part in the effort to defend the city. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Βίος και πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου Ἀντωνίου Νέου*, 199. On civilian participation in local defense in Byzantium, see C. G. Makrypoulias, "Civilians as Combatants in Byzantium: Ideological versus Practical Considerations," in Koder and Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology*, 109–20.

114 *Annae Comnenae Alexias* (ed. Reinsch and Kambylis), 4.2, 5.4.1.

115 A. Meineke, ed., *Ioannis Cinnami epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum* (Bonn, 1836), 22; *Nicetae Choniatae historia* (ed. van Dieten), 37.

116 *Nicetae Choniatae historia* (ed. van Dieten), 72–73.

imperial power's interests to defend the empire's territorial integrity, but enemy attacks did not automatically elicit or strengthen provincial attachment to the Roman imperial power or promote pervasiveness of the idea of a just war fought on behalf of the Roman imperial politeia. Such attitudes depended on the degree of provincial elites' loyalty to Constantinopolitan political culture and their vested interest in the imperial system. Ideological attachment to the interest of the local homeland could very well justify actions of local defense independently from the idea of defending the empire. It could equally justify decisions to side with the empire's enemies and fight against the Roman imperial power if it seemed to better serve local interests.

*Shaping the War Ideology of
Constantinopolitan Commoners*

The commoners of Constantinople are usually viewed as that part of the empire's lower social strata with the most potential of assimilating the Roman state's normative imperial ideology. There is good reason for this given that their proximity to the emperor and court society exposed Constantinopolitans more frequently and directly to messages conveying that normative imperial ideology and in particular ideas about Christian Roman just war. The textual development of the story of the 42 martyrs of Amorion—the 42 Roman prisoners of war publicly executed by the Abbasids because of their faith in 845—provides a good example of how the dissemination of Roman ideals in the imperial city could differ from that in provincial contexts. The genre and the location of the emergence of the various versions of the martyrion make it an important source of information on ideas about war, given that they were broadly disseminated to audiences from different geographical and social contexts.¹¹⁷

Among the earliest versions, if not the earliest, of the martyrion is BHG 1212 (B),¹¹⁸ whose authorship

a recent theory attributes to a provincial individual.¹¹⁹ A close look at the content of that text shows that the author had no interest in writing a story integrating the martyrdom of the 42 soldiers into the grand narrative of the empire's defense against its main enemy, the Muslims. Despite the positive characterization of Theophilos (r. 829–842) as a great emperor, an indication of the author's iconoclastic background, the sack of Amorion in 838 by the Muslims is presented as an act of vengeance for the emperor's raids on Muslim soil.¹²⁰ Thus, although the author is not as blatantly critical of the imperial power's military activity on the eastern front as the author of the *Life* of St. Antony, his discourse similarly points to a critical provincial stance toward imperial just war, given that he presents the imperial campaigns against the empire's enemies in the east as having prompted the Muslim attack. That stance is further made explicit by the author's short reference to the infamous act of a traitor who let the enemy into the city, presenting it as hearsay.¹²¹ Thus, he was not keen to place blame for the defeat exclusively on some evil traitor and exonerate the imperial power for not adequately preparing the defense of the city.

In this context, the author nowhere presents the martyrdom of the captives as an act that took place on behalf of or was related in any way to the Roman imperial politeia, despite some of them being high-ranking officers in the imperial army. His intention appears to have been to gift the provincial society of Asia Minor a story of Christian heroism out of a story of destruction, suffering, and captivity. The main message conveyed by the text is that even though the imperial government ultimately failed to protect Amorion, the Christian captives were not defeated spiritually. Their religious, ideological triumph over their captors by resisting conversion and dying bravely on behalf of their faith could, therefore, function as an example for fellow Christians elsewhere in the empire and raise the spirits of provincial society, which had suffered the grave consequences of defeat.

117 On hagiography as a genre that reached a broader and socially diverse audience, see S. Efthymiades, "The Byzantine Hagiographer and His Audience in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," in *Metaphrasis: Redactions and Audiences in Middle Byzantine Hagiography*, ed. C. Högel (Oslo, 1996), 66–67.

118 The earliest versions of the martyrion, the texts of group B, have been dated between 847 and 856. See S. Kortzabassi, "Τὸ μαρτύριο τῶν μβ' μαρτύρων τοῦ Ἀμορίου: Ἀγιολογικὰ καὶ ὑμνολογικὰ κείμενα," *Επ.Επ. Φιλ. Σχολ. Αθην.* 2 (1992): 120–24.

119 M.-F. Auzepy, R. C. Bondoux, and J. P. Grégois, "Une version originale du martyre des XVII d'Amorion: BHG 1212," *TM* 24.2 (2020): 277–325, esp. 291–98.

120 Nikitin and Vasilievskij, *Skazaniia o 42 amorijskich mucenikach*, 11.21–31.

121 Nikitin and Vasilievskij, *Skazaniia o 42 amorijskich mucenikach*, 12.9–11.

The same story, however, acquired a different meaning and conveyed different messages in other versions of the martyrion, which were produced over a short period of time in Constantinople. It was, actually, in the imperial capital that the cult of the 42 martyrs was established and flourished in the second half of the ninth century,¹²² as the building of a church dedicated to them during the reign of Basil I demonstrates.¹²³ Michael Synkellos, author of version BHG 1213 (G) in Constantinople, offers a different take on the martyrdom.¹²⁴ His version focuses on Kallistos, a Roman officer who had been captured at some other time by the Muslims and, according to the author, was later grouped with the captives from Amorion and became one of the 42 executed in 845 on 6 March.

Synkellos was keen to present the 42 martyrs not simply as heroes of the Christian faith, but as representatives of the Christian Roman imperial politeia who had died on its behalf, thus becoming its supernatural defenders through their martyrdom. In his text, the martyrs are celebrated as generals and champions, local rulers, and governors in the service of the divinely ordained Roman imperial power and are hailed as the fortifying walls of Christianity's reigning city, Constantinople.¹²⁵ Moreover, the author highlights their role as intercessors with God, seeking to crown the Roman emperors with victories against the Muslims, and calls them guardians of the Rhōmaiōn politeia.¹²⁶ A similar ideological stance is attested in BHG 1209a (D), another early version of the martyrion. The author of that text addresses the saints thus: "You strengthened our rulers, corroborated our faith, set the defiled people of the Ismaelites under our orthodox emperor's feet."¹²⁷

A comparison between the provincial and the Constantinopolitan versions of the martyrdom demonstrates how hagiography written in the capital and addressed to a broader Constantinopolitan audience could be influenced by the Roman imperial ideology of just war and be used as a tool to influence the local audience. The Constantinopolitan authors keenly sought to bind the captive soldiers' martyrdom to the notion of defense of the imperial city and the whole Roman imperial politeia and the victorious conduct of war by the Roman emperors. Such notions were absent from the provincial version, written as it was by an author whose ideology seems not to have been shaped by Constantinopolitan imperial culture. In the Constantinopolitan mind, the Christian heroes and protectors of provincial society were also heroes and guardians of the Christian Roman imperial state; these are the messages that the Constantinopolitan versions of the martyrion conveyed to their audience at the yearly celebration of the establishment of the saints' cult in the city.

Hagiography was not the only way to integrate parts of the Constantinopolitan lower strata into the dominant imperial ideology of just war. The rituals and symbolisms of the public ceremonies following military campaigns also served as important tools. The triumph of the commander Belisarius after the conquest of the Vandal kingdom represents a good example of how an emperor, Justinian I, who never personally led the empire's army on the battlefield, communicated the notion of a just war of reconquest to the citizenry. Justinian's main goal was to appropriate the glory of victory by displaying his authority over both the defeated Vandal ruler and his victorious general. Belisarius was ordered to go on foot to the Hippodrome, where the treasures and captives taken during the war had been put on display. There, the commoners watched the general pay obeisance to the emperor in the same manner as the defeated Vandal ruler Gelimer.¹²⁸ The absence of religiously charged symbolisms from that ceremony points to Justinian's intention to convey a straightforward message to the citizenry of mid-sixth-century Constantinople that the Roman emperor had the right to reclaim foreign lands that had once been under Roman rule.

122 Kotzabassi, "Τὸ μαρτύριο τῶν μὲν μαρτύρων τοῦ Ἀμορίου," 120–27.

123 I. Ševčenko, *Vita Basilii Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur: Liber quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris ampelicitur*, CFHB 42 (Berlin, 2011), 298; cf. R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin*, pt. 1, *Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1969), 486.

124 Kotzabassi, "Τὸ μαρτύριο τῶν μὲν μαρτύρων τοῦ Ἀμορίου," 124.

125 P. Nikitin and V. Vasilievskij, *Skazaniia o 42 amorijskich mucenikach: Encomium martyrum XLII Amoriensum (Versio I)* (St. Petersburg, 1906), 36.8–10.

126 Nikitin and Vasilievskij, *Skazaniia o 42 amorijskich mucenikach*, 36.15–17.

127 P. Nikitin and V. Vasilievskij, *Skazaniia o 42 amorijskich mucenikach: Martyrium Δ (sub auctore Sophronio)* (St. Petersburg, 1906), 54–56.

128 G. Wirth and J. Hauray, *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia: De bellis*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1962–1963), 4.10.

A little more than half a century later, Heraclius's return to Constantinople after the end of his victorious Persian campaigns was not celebrated with a triumph, but the religious element in the ceremony of the emperor's arrival was now more prominent. According to Theophanes, parts of the citizenry went out to meet the emperor at Hieria. The people acclaimed Heraclius, and his son received him with an emotional embrace while everyone sang hymns of thanksgiving to God.¹²⁹ The ritual points to a shared perception among Constantinopolitans that the defeat of the Persians and the reconquest of the eastern provinces had been motivated by a just cause that had realized its just end by the will and assistance of God.

A different episode from the second half of the eighth century shows how Constantinopolitans could actively partake in the ideology of imperial victory. Constantine V (r. 741–775) held two imperial triumphs in the context of his victorious campaigns against the pagan Bulgars.¹³⁰ In one of those triumphs, in 763, the emperor entered the city with his army in procession, exhibiting Bulgar prisoners of war. The captives were then handed over to members of the city factions, who publicly executed them.¹³¹ Despite the atrocious character of the ceremony, the event clearly reveals the ideological connotations of the attitudes of parts of Constantinopolitan society toward imperial war. The citizenry's belief that they represented a superior political order justified the killing of the captives; the community of the imperial city had the right to subjugate and exterminate the inferior barbarian enemies that threatened it.

By the tenth century, the central ideological message of imperial triumphs held that just war enjoyed the full support of God. The triumph held in Constantinople in 971 by John I Tzimiskes (r. 971–976), on the occasion of the first conquest of the Christian Bulgarian kingdom, is a case in point. As the emperor crossed the city on horseback, a chariot preceded him on which an icon of the Virgin sat atop the Bulgarian imperial regalia.

The triumphal procession ended with Tzimiskes entering the church of Hagia Sophia, where he held prayers of thanksgiving and dedicated the Bulgarian crown to God.¹³² The emperor's subjugation of the Bulgarians, Chalcedonian Christians, went against the normative notion of peace among Christian brothers that the imperial power had consistently propagated since the first half of the tenth century, when the Bulgarians were on the offensive.¹³³ Their subjugation could still, however, be justified by the idea that they had violated and possessed former Roman territory. Diplomatic letters that the court official Theodoros Daphnopates addressed to the Bulgarian tsar Symeon highlight that normative notion of just war,¹³⁴ but such ideological considerations had no place in public justifications of Tzimiskes' subjugation of the Christian Bulgarian kingdom. The notion that his war was just could be best received and rationalized by the citizenry through direct visual references to the role of the divine. Seeing the icon of the Virgin on top of the Bulgarian symbols of kingship was intended to reassure Constantinopolitans that God had approved the subjugation of their fellow Christians to the superior Roman imperial rule.

A similar illustrative example from a later period, the twelfth century, is worth mentioning here for the sake of comparison. The detailed report on the triumph held in 1133 by Emperor John II Komnenos after the reconquest of the city of Kastamonou, in Asia Minor, from the infidel Turks states that the procession consisted of a chariot carrying an icon of the Virgin while the emperor traveled on foot.¹³⁵ The similarity of Tzimiskes, and John's triumphs not only testifies to a certain continuity in the ways ideological messages were staged to convey and inform the perspective of the Constantinopolitan citizenry, it also demonstrates that the enemy's religion did not make a difference in the

129 *Theophanis Chronographia* (ed. de Boor), 328.

130 M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), 134–35.

131 *Theophanis Chronographia* (ed. de Boor), 433; C. Mango, ed., *Nicephori patriarchae constantinopolitani breviarium historicum*, CFHB 13 (Washington, DC, 1990), 76 (pp. 148–50).

132 *Leonis diaconi Caloensis Historiae* (ed. Hase), 158.

133 A. Kolia-Dermizaki, "Το εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο στις ομιλίες και τις επιστολές του 10ου και 11ου αι. Μια ιδεολογική προσέγγιση," in *Το εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο (9ος–12ος αι.)* (Athens, 1997), 213–38; cf. Y. Stouraitis, "Byzantine War against Christians: An Emphylios Polemos?," *Byzantina Symmeikta* 20 (2010): 93–95.

134 J. Darrouzès and L. G. Westerink, *Théodore Daphnopates, Correspondance* (Paris, 1978), 65, 121–24.

135 *Nicetae Choniatae historia* (ed. van Dieten), 13; P. Magdalino, "The Triumph of 1133," in *John II Komnenos, Emperor of Byzantium: In the Shadow of Father and Son*, ed. A. Bucossi and A. Rodríguez Suarez (Farnham, 2016), 53–70.

use of religious imagery and symbolisms to highlight and disseminate the idea that war against the empire's enemies was just given that it enjoyed God's approval.




The aim here has been to examine notions of and attitudes toward just war at social strata beneath the ruling elite, focusing primarily on evidence from the period between the seventh and the tenth centuries. Analysis of Heraclius's Persian campaigns serves to problematize the use of the analytical concepts of "holy war" or "sacred war" and crusade as well as to emphasize the need to recognize how top-down ideological messages may have been received differently by common soldiers of various confessional, social, and geographical backgrounds. Moreover, a reading is suggested of the *Taktika* of Leo VI, the most "theorizing" Byzantine text about just war, based on the heuristic distinction between a social order's normative and operative ideologies, a distinction further examined with examples from other sources.

The analysis of the *Taktika* highlights differences and similarities between the content of the Roman imperial office's normative ideology of just war, *dikaios polemos*, as conveyed to the empire's generals and the content of those commonly shared ideas, beliefs, and values that appealed, or were thought to appeal, to common soldiers at the beginning of the tenth century. The imperial ideology of *dikaios polemos* predominated within court society and among the empire's elite of service. In short, it appealed to all those with vested interests in the imperial system and administration who were to varying degrees integrated into Constantinople's political culture. Its main societal function was to bolster the cohesion of the leading societal group while programmatically determining the role of war in the organization of the Eastern Roman Empire's past, present, and future. Acceptance of that normative ideology

by the lower strata of society, whether common soldiers or provincial populations, was of little importance and not a primary goal of the power elite. The *Taktika* testifies to the imperial power's awareness of the need to adapt the content of ideological messages propagated on the battlefield to the thought world of the common soldiers. Thus, a set of shared notions, at the core of which stood the overarching belief that God's support in war was the main signifier that the cause for resorting to war had been just, shaped the imperial army's operative ideology of just war. That just cause was strictly identified with and overdetermined by the idea of defending one's own territory, either on the local or supra-local level.

Based on the above, the societal pervasiveness of that operative ideology beyond the limits of the army was examined. That analysis reveals that the ideological approach to just war in different types of texts composed by court authors or writers imbued with the Constantinopolitan imperial mentality could differ from those of texts written by provincial authors, who were not well integrated into Constantinopolitan culture. This comparison highlights that beyond the boundaries of the army as a social group, the notion of just war interrelated with the Roman *raison d'état*—that is, with the promotion of the interests of the Roman imperial power and the imperial *politeia*—could be of no or far less significance compared to the notion of local interest. The latter, local interest, overdetermined provincial populations' perceptions of just war of defense and attitudes toward imperial warfare.

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